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Student Group Was Founded To Counter Reds

By PHILIP POTTER

[Washington Bureau of The Sun]

Washington, Feb. 16—The National Students Association, formed in 1947 by students of several hundred American college campuses, led a most impetuous existence until it hit the CIA jackpot in 1952.

This was the word tonight from its first president, William Welsh, now a 42-year-old administrative assistant to Vice President Humphrey. When the N.S.A. was organized he was a student at Berea College in Berea, Ky.

First Home

The N.S.A.'s first home was on the second floor of an abandoned elementary school in Madison, Wis., a property taken over by the University of Wisconsin, which was host to the constitutional convention at which the student association was organized.

The idea for such an organization began with 25 college students returning from Prague, where they had gone in the summer of 1946 to help organize the International Union of Students.

There they had found what Welsh called "highly organized and sophisticated" delegations from the Communist bloc of nations and representatives of Western European student unions with a long reputation of political action.

Needed Organization

If American students were going to hold their own in debate at "rough conferences" like that one, Welsh said, it was felt they needed a formal structure at home. After a series of planning sessions at the University of Chicago and at Madison, the N.S.A. was born.

Although 40 or 50 then existing student groups like the Y.M.C.A. and the Young Progressives took part in the planning discussions and the constitutional convention, it was decided to exclude existing groups from representation and make the N.S.A. directly answerable to the nation's college campuses.

Delegates to the annual convention either were to be elected directly by student bodies or appointed by elected student governments.

Nor did the organizers want the new association to be controlled by executive secretaries on a permanent basis. Thus all officers were to be students on a year's leave from their campuses.

Fully Democratic

It was felt that an organization so constituted would be fully democratic and better able to ward off any Communist invasion tactics.

Financing was to be prorated, with students bodies of smaller schools paying dues of \$25 annually with the scale going to \$400 for the nation's largest institutions.

The organization was not to come into being until ratification of the constitution by two-thirds of the 320 campuses represented at the 1947 Madison meeting.

A major question was that of affiliation with the International Union of Students, which some at the 1946 Prague conference thought already had come under Communist domination.

Send Observers

Postponing affiliation, the National Students Association decided to send only an observer to the International Union of Students headquarters in Prague. William Ellis, a Negro attending Harvard was chosen.

At the time the National Students Association's first vice presidents were Robert Smith, of Harvard, and Ralph Dungan, of St. Joseph's College in Philadelphia, who was later one of President Kennedy's principal White House aides and now serves as Ambassador to Chile. These men and Welsh took leave from their schools to go on the road and convince enough colleges to ratify the constitution and pay their dues.

The kitty at the time held only a few hundred dollars and the quarters loaned to the association were furnished with second-hand typewriters and Army surplus desks.

The selling job, Welsh said, was difficult because many college administrations feared the National Students Association would fall into Communist hands.

He and Dungan, for instance, were once asked to speak before the Detroit Economic Club, whose president was convinced the N.S.A. was a Communist.

"We took on its 400 members

In May, 1948, Ellis reported from Prague that leaders of the International Union of Students

were intimately involved in the social action committees that the Communist party used to topple the democratic government of Dr. Eduard Benes and establish Red rule.

Welsh, Dungan and Smith decided in a telephone conference call to issue a strong condemnation of the coup and the International Union of Students par in it, and called Ellis back to the United States.

"That was the best decision I ever made," Welsh said. "We

caught hell from the executive board for acting without consulting its members, but I believe we were smart. This was the end of all contact with the International Union of Students."

When he was president, he said, he sought to focus on domestic problems facing student bodies, such as the issue over segregation. Smith as international vice president established effective coordination of student tours abroad and student exchange programs.

Welsh said he was adamant about keeping the National Students Association student-oriented and felt it ought to be campus-financed, too.

Face Up To Financing

"I felt it ought to be an organization of student governments and that they ought to face up to the financing—that if they did not, life would get complicated," he said.

He went back to school after his year as president, never held further office in the National Students Association and was never made aware of the CIA financing that began in 1952.

"I have been trying to reconstruct what must have transpired in 1952," Welsh said.

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know the association was having financial problems and wanted to do more than it was able to do. Another fact may have been that McCarthyism was then reaching its peak and the CIA link may have been made for protection—insurance so the N.S.A. would not get hit.

"In the first year, we had a terrible time convincing people the organization was not a subtle plot for a Communist takeover of the campuses, since the idea for it came from the group attending that 1946 Prague meeting.

Welsh declined to make public a judgment on the decision of the 1952 officers to take CIA money.

Welsh said the West had nothing comparable to the Communist dominated International Union of Students, or the World Federation of Democratic Youth that, in the early 1950's, were making substantial inroads among the youth of non-aligned countries.

"I don't think there would have been anything wrong in getting public money into the National Students Association," he said. "I have no qualms about that. The real question is whether this had to be done covertly."

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